

What Do Users Want From a State of the Environment Report? A Case Study of the *State of the Scotian Shelf Report*

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Abstract

This study examined the awareness and use of the *State of the Scotian Shelf (SoSS) Report* using a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Its aim was to investigate use of the report following publication in 2011, with the intent of providing recommendations for future state of the environment reporting efforts.

Introduction

The Eastern Scotian Shelf Integrated Management Initiative (ESSIM) was launched in 1998.

The ESSIM Initiative was guided by a Stakeholder Advisory Committee (SAC), which brought together governmental, community, and industry stakeholders.

As part of ESSIM's activities, the *SoSS Report* was developed to provide a basis for monitoring and evaluation.

ESSIM ended in 2010 after not receiving ministerial approval. However, the decision was made to publish the *SoSS Report*.

DFO approached the Environmental Information: Use and Influence Research Program to conduct a study assessing the report's use and to develop recommendations for further reporting efforts.

Guiding Questions

What are the uses of state of the environment reports?

Is there evidence of awareness and use of the *SoSS Report* by its intended audience?

What steps could DFO take to increase awareness and use of the *SoSS Report*?

What steps could DFO and other organizations take to improve future state of the environment reporting efforts?

Methods

Surveys

Online surveys were distributed to two groups: subscribers to ACZISC's Coastal Update e-newsletter and former members of the ESSIM SAC.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Interviews were conducted with eight members of the ESSIM SAC, representing the following:

- Federal government
- Provincial government
- Industry groups
- Community/First Nations groups

Web Analytics

Google Analytics was used to capture web traffic statistics for the *SoSS Report's* location at www.coinatlantic.ca.

Citation Searching

Searches for citations of the *SoSS Report* were conducted in Web of Science, Google Scholar, and Scopus.

I think the whole aspect of public education and participation hinges on the availability of this sort of information.

Interview Participant A

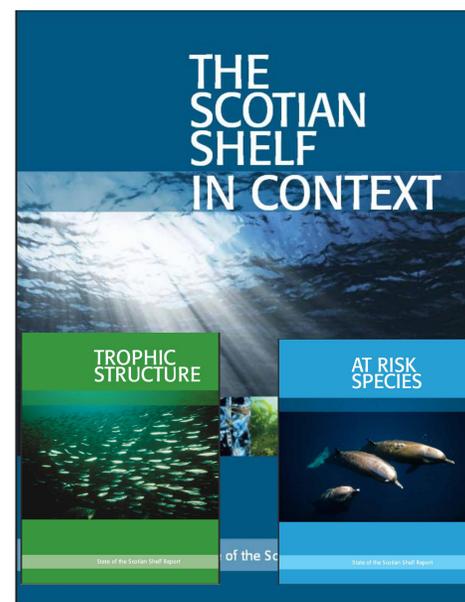


Fig. 1: The *SoSS Report* consists of a context document and issue-based theme papers.

If you don't keep it under the noses of people like me or anybody else, or the people who would have an interest in it, or a growing interest... If you don't push it, they're not going to find it.

Interview Participant B

Results and Recommendations

Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate	% Exit
	1,388 % of Total: 0.93% (149,069)	756 % of Total: 0.72% (105,697)	00:01:09 Site Avg: 00:01:41 (-31.83%)	39.51% Site Avg: 60.51% (-34.71%)	23.05% Site Avg: 39.40% (-41.48%)
1. /index.php/state-of-coast-and-ocean/state-of-the-scotian-shelf	1,388(100.00%)	756(100.00%)	00:01:09	39.51%	23.05%

Page	Pageviews	Unique Pageviews	Avg. Time on Page	Bounce Rate	% Exit
	1,954 % of Total: 1.31% (149,069)	1,290 % of Total: 1.22% (105,697)	00:01:31 Site Avg: 00:01:41 (-10.32%)	45.68% Site Avg: 60.51% (-24.51%)	36.90% Site Avg: 39.40% (-6.34%)
1. /index.php/state-of-the-scotian-shelf	1,954(100.00%)	1,290(100.00%)	00:01:31	45.68%	36.90%

Fig. 2: Google Analytics data for two *SoSS Report* landing pages

Results:

State of the environment reports serve a range of uses for a variety of audiences.

Users identified the *SoSS Report* as:

- a useful background for primary scientific documents
- a decision-making aid for policymakers
- an evaluative tool for integrated management efforts
- a useful public education tool for activists
- a necessity for participation in the democratic process.

Participants are largely satisfied with the report, but would like it expanded. They recommend updating the report regularly.

Recommendations:

Increase promotion of the report through social media, events like Oceans Day, and a staggered updating schedule.

The ESSIM process of stakeholder engagement was successful in enhancing the report's salience, legitimacy, and credibility, and should be continued in other reporting efforts.

State of the environment reports are likely to have greater uptake and use if they are linked to active integrated management initiatives.

For future state of the environment reports, evaluation of awareness and use will be more successful if evaluation is treated as a component of initial program planning.

References

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